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SUBJECT: AMNA DIRAR FORMS EASTERN DEMOCRATIC PARTY, LAMENTS
EFFECTIVE DISSOLUTION OF EASTERN FRONT

REF: 08 KHARTOUM 1278

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Eastern Front has effectively dissolved after electoral officials denied requests to register it as a political party, Dr. Amna Dirar told poloffs in a May 17 meeting. In response to this setback, Dirar formed the Eastern Democratic Party to provide an alternative to the tribal- and clan-based politics of the Beja Congress and Free Lions movements that make up the Eastern Front. Dirar worried that the de-facto dissolution of the Front, which is the sole signatory to the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA), could in fact invalidate that agreement. This concern is largely mooted, however, by the lack of any progress in ESPN implementation. Dirar also expressed concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Eastern Sudan and the burgeoning Eritrean refugee population, and expressed hope that SE Gration would visit the East on future trips. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Bio Note: Dr. Amna Dirar is the daughter of Mohamed Salih Dirar, an intellectual who was among the founders of the Beja Congress in 1958. She was a professor at Ahfad University in Omdurman when she was elected as Vice Chairman of the Beja Congress in 2005. Having engaged in a low-intensity insurrection against the GOS for over a decade, the Beja Congress joined forces with another erstwhile member of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the Free Lions movement of Rashaida Arabs, to form the Eastern Front in 2005, and Dirar became the Front's Deputy Chairman. Upon the signing of the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPN) between the GOS and the Eastern Front in 2006, she became a Presidential Advisor. In 2008, Dirar attempted to remove Eastern Front Chairman Musa Mohamed Ahmed from the Front's leadership after he organized a separate party conference of the Beja Congress, accusing Ahmed of trying to lead two political parties simultaneously. (Note: Since the formation of the Eastern Front, there has been a debate on the need for separate Beja and Rashaida Organizations, and whether membership in the Eastern Front and such organizations is mutually exclusive. End Note.) Musa Mohamed Ahmed responded by expelling Dirar from the Beja Congress, but Dirar dismissed this as a meaningless reprisal, asserting that she had relinquished membership in the Beja Congress. With "4hd bormatingf Eactern FroLT&QQ+. (SRW) NQe4ilG,wypf8pO|vfs m>\$i- 1 in8Ja2dmQY/P@) cQ,tcQ}bQnAh##nHn!dzar-mt|OKjve|aDBo7\$ %V&xC34vLQ2qn, the people of the East have no alternative to the tribal- and clan-based politics embodied by the Beja Congress or the Free Lions Movement, she said. As such, Dirar stated she decided to form the Eastern Democratic Party to transcend ethnic lines. Like the Eastern Front, the Eastern Democratic Party will focus on achieving development for Eastern Sudan, ESPN implementation, and democratic transformation, she said. "The party contains not just Beja but other ethnicities present in the East," including Darfuri, Hawsa, and Nubians, she said. While pleased at the existence of an Eastern party not based on tribal affiliation, Dirar lamented that her failure to register the Eastern Front name will assure dissolution of the Front. "The Eastern Front is the

signatory to the SPA, so if there is no Eastern Front does that mean there is no SPA?" she wondered.

¶ 14. (SBU) Dirar stated that the breakup of the Front had been a long time in coming as Eastern Front Chairman Musa Mohamed Ahmed and Secretary General Mubarak Mabruk Salim had chosen to dedicate themselves to the Beja Congress and Free Lions, respectively. Dirar said she has almost "no relationship" with either of them anymore. The Beja Congress is foundering, she said, having split into so many small units that "it is not even a party." Under Musa's leadership, it has been reduced beyond even a tribal movement to a clan-based one, she asserted, noting that all its leadership comes from the Garib (phonetic) clan of Hadandowa, a Beja tribe. Other political parties in the East were similarly weak, she said. The SPLM fell short of its aspirations in Northern Sudan, having abandoned the East to focus on its South-centric platform. The other traditional power in the East, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), is weak after the NCP bought-off its strongest supporters there. Despite the weakness of opposition parties in northern Sudan relative to the NCP, Dirar said the Eastern Democratic Party would like to build coalitions or alliances, but harbored little hope that the projected 2010 election would result in anything but an NCP victory.

¶ 15. (SBU) With regard to the implementation of the SPA, Dirar stated that there has been "no progress at all," contending that even recently touted progress on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) is overstated. The last of the supposedly

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monthly meetings of the executive committee on SPA Implementation chaired by Vice President Taha took place in November, she said. Furthermore, she noted that money credited to the Eastern Sudan Reconstruction and Development Fund was actually part of the regular development budget for each of the three Eastern States and thus controlled by the Wali of each. Dirar did note that after several months of trying, she succeeded in obtaining some funding for the promotion of women's livelihood activities, but other income generating projects are needed.

¶ 16. (SBU) According to Dirar, the humanitarian situation in Eastern Sudan continues to be dire. Three of the thirteen expelled NGOs were active in East Sudan, she said, and restricted access for existing NGOs remains a significant obstacle. She said tuberculosis is a growing problem and is on the verge of wiping out thirteen tribes in remote areas with no hospitals or clinics. The East also must deal with a growing number of Eritrean refugees. Dirar stated that as of last year, at least 40 new arrivals came daily via Port Sudan, and even more through the porous border between Kassala and Tessenei. (Note: UNHCR officials in Kassala assess that the new arrivals are mostly young men and women in their twenties, predominately urban and educated, who are fleeing forcible recruitment or arrest for desertion from the army or National Service. Among the new arrivals are also a significant number of unaccompanied minors (UAM). UNHCR has registered 8,454 new Eritrean refugee arrivals thus far in 2009, compared to only 4,040 during the same period last year. Nearly 20,000 new Eritrean refugees entered eastern Sudan in 2008, and given current trends, UNHCR expects over 45,000 to enter this year. 1172 Eritrean UAMs have been registered by UNHCR since January 2008. End note.) She estimated there are more than 100,000 Eritreans in East Sudan. (Note: UNHCR estimates 90,000. End note.) The Government of Sudan (GOS) has made no move to grant citizenship to those with a long-time presence in Sudan, she continued. Simultaneously, the GOS does not provide mechanisms for Eritreans to return home, effectively stranding them as stateless.

¶ 17. (SBU) Comment: With the Eastern Front in disarray politically and with no leverage to implement the SPA, prospects for development in the East remain as gloomy as ever. The calls for a return to war are not realistic, as the Eastern Front was never a significant military force. Guerrillas from both the Beja Congress and the Free Lions relied almost completely on small arms during the years of the struggle, with the heavy weapons used in attacks on Hamish Koreib and Kassala remaining exclusively in the hands of the Eritrean Army or the SPLA. Neither of these patrons currently supports the marginalized peoples of the East as a result of Eritrea's

rapprochement with the GOS and the SPLM's South-centric focus. Thus, there is little prospect or danger of renewed fighting in the East, though the humanitarian situation continues to be dire.

ASQUINO